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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KISL](#) [PTER](#) [KTFN](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#) [LE](#) [BA](#) [SA](#) [KU](#) [SHI](#)
SUBJECT: KUWAIT BRINGS TOGETHER IRANIAN AND ARAB SHI'A,
PRINCE HASSAN TO DISCUSS CHARITY AND RELIGIOUS ENDOWMENTS

Classified By: Richard LeBaron for reasons 1.4(b) and (d)

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: Kuwait hosted March 26-27 a conference that brought together Shi'a Awqaf officials from around the region. The discussion highlighted what some Shi'a, especially in the Gulf, see as a disconnect between centralized, distant Awqaf authorities and ordinary Shi'a donors. Some noted their unwillingness to send charitable donations to distant Awqaf administrators in Iraq and Iran. Other participants, including Prince Hassan of Jordan and Kuwait's Awqaf Minister, stressed Sunni-Shi'a tolerance and the importance of Islamic charitable giving. End Summary.

Speakers Stress Tolerance, Importance of Charitable Giving

¶2. (U) Kuwait held a Ja'afari (Shi'a) Waqf conference from March 26-27 under the patronage of the Amir. Shi'a clerics and lay people from Iran, Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, and Saudi Arabia joined their Kuwaiti hosts to discuss ways to improve the performance of Shi'a religious endowments (waqf in Arabic, plural awqaf). The opening session served to play down Shi'a-Sunni tensions, which witnessed a period of inflammatory rhetoric in Kuwait earlier this year.

¶3. (C/NF) The (Sunni) Minister of Awqaf and Islamic Affairs, Abdullah Al-Ma'atouq, represented the Amir at the conference's opening session and spoke in general terms about the importance of charitable giving and awqaf in Islam. The GOK brought in Prince Hassan Bin Talal of Jordan, a Sunni, as the keynote speaker. Prince Hassan described the effectiveness of Muslim charity work around the world and emphasized the importance of charity being disbursed to those who need it regardless of religion or sect. While encouraging cooperative efforts with the West, he complained that the war on terror has done more to stymie positive charity work than to prevent terrorism. That evening the Ambassador and Political Counselor heard similar themes from Prince Hassan during an impromptu speech to a crowd at the diwaniyya of prominent Shi'a businessman Jawad Bukhamseen. He also described to the assembled group of Kuwaiti Shi'as his participation in a moving interfaith delegation to Auschwitz, describing it as "an answer to what Ahmadinejad offers." (Note: The Bukhamseen diwaniyya is considered a must on the Shi'a diwaniyya circuit. End Note.)

Gulf Shi'a: Alienated from Iran, Iraq Awqaf Authorities

¶4. (C/NF) The three working sessions on March 26 and 27 focused on seemingly mundane technical and practical aspects of administering Shi'a Awqaf. However, some of the tensions surrounding control of the significant resources controlled by Islamic awqaf came to the surface, especially in the question-and-answer sessions. For instance, Hussein

Al-Taswaji, the former Assistant Director of Awqaf in Iran, spoke about the importance of centralizing waqf administration and tying it to religious authorities (marja'iyya in Shi'a parlance) in order to protect the waqf from forces that would squander waqf resources. A Bahraini participant commented that this was impractical in countries without clearly recognized Shi'a marja'iyyas. A Kuwaiti attendee complained that waqf projects seemed out of touch with the everyday needs of the common people.

15. (C/NF) One close Embassy Shi'a contact reiterated privately to PolCouns that the activities of the awqaf administration seemed distant to many Shi'a in Kuwait, which made Kuwaitis more likely to give to local organizations. He noted that his own family tended to consider long-deceased Grand Ayatollah Khoi its source of religious authority, in part to avoid the politics of sending donations to Ayatollahs in Iran and Iraq. Kuwait's Assistant Secretary General for Waqf Expenditures made several recommendations for improving the use of awqaf, including increased exchanges of best practices between Gulf countries as well as an increased role for NGOs and local charities.

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